
Tim Lanzendörfer. *The Professionalization of the American Magazine: Periodicals, Biography, and Nationalism in the Early Republic.* Beiträge zur englischen und amerikanischen Literatur 33. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013, 355 pp., 10 figures, € 48.00.

With the digitization of periodical archives such as *American Periodicals Series Online* and the *American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals Collection*, Sesame opened for scholars working in the field of Early American literature, making the exploration of a vast textual corpus easier than ever before. Studies such as Jared Gardner's *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture* (2012) and Patricia Okker's *Social Stories* (2003), the one depicting the frustrations involved in periodical publishing, the other the importance of magazines for the development of the novel, have shown the extent to which the study of periodical and print culture challenges our understanding of genres and notions of originality and authorship.

In the past, periodicals have often played a part in straightforward, 'easy' narratives of America's strife for political independence and cultural autonomy, where they tend to be depicted as mouthpieces of nationalistic thought and emancipation. However, thirty odd years after the publication of Benedict Anderson's seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983), in which the newspaper emerged as one of the crucial tools of a nascent print capitalism in the United States, periodical publishing, and the magazine in particular, are subject to a far more finely tuned analysis.

Tim Lanzendörfer's *The Professionalization of the American Magazine* seeks to correct oversimplified narratives of periodical publishing that frequently obscure the complex interrelations between the marketization of publishing and nineteenth-century nationalist discourse. He takes an explicitly antagonistic position towards 'idealistic' approaches to this sector of publishing, which contribute to what he terms a "fantasy of common virtue and disinterested editorship" (305). Lanzendörfer argues that periodicals were not the active shapers of political sentiment, run by keen patriots on an altruistic agenda, that they have traditionally been taken for. Instead, they excelled at picking up trends and tendencies in order to maximize financial profit. Editors were in close touch with the "ideas and ideals of the market" (305), which were articulated in an increasingly unabashed manner during the Early Republic, the period which saw the professionalization of authorship and editorship.

In the course of the three long main chapters of his book, Lanzendörfer shows how magazines became "investments" (305) and part of a "market revolution" (303): the "[...] monetary interest predominated to the detriment of a clearly articulated political message – and, more importantly, [...] the political message was itself a means of advancing the monetary interest [...]" (303). One of his book's strengths is its lively rendering of the communication between readers, editors, publishers, subscribers and contributors, drawing upon e.g. editorial paratexts (i.e. prefaces, prospectuses, letters from and to the editor) and correspondence between these individuals. Such documents give the reader a glimpse into the admin work that periodical publishing required: agreement on payment methods had to be sought, debts needed setting, reliable subscribers had to be recruited and kept, postage paid.

Following his introduction, where Lanzendörfer lays out the structure and agenda of his book and sums up some of the recent developments in periodical research, Chapter One provides an overview of the lively publishing industry in the Early Republic, the functions of magazines, the conditions under which they thrived as well as the monetary and material limitations within which their makers had to operate. The circumstantial nature of much of what constituted magazine publishing, the role of the subscription system and advertisement as the two main sources of income, the struggle for survival and permanence within a highly competitive and ephemeral market, the catering to increasingly diverse readerships – these are some of the pressures imposed on the magazine as a publishing genre in the early nineteenth century as well as on the individuals who ran the business.

In Chapter Two Lanzendörfer turns to the key example of his study: Joseph Dennie's *Port Folio*. Published in Philadelphia and on the market for more than twenty years, both as a weekly and later on monthly publication, the *Port Folio*

offers an intriguing case study of the increasing professionalization of magazine publishing. Lanzendörfer dwells on the day-to-day chores that the real-life magazine editor (in contrast to the fictional editor figure, who also plays such a prominent role in this magazine) had to cope with. Chapter Three then follows up one of the central claims of this book, that magazines “[r]ather than actively creating ideological change, [...] became increasingly adept at noticing and profiting of momentary shifts in the interests of their readerships” (210). This is reflected by the uses to which biography was put as a leading genre in magazines such as the *Port Folio* and the *Analectic Magazine*. Biography became an extremely fashionable and lucrative genre for magazines in the 1810s following the War of 1812, an event that had instigated readers’ interest in naval and military heroes. However, as Lanzendörfer argues, magazines did not cause this infatuation, but rather responded to it by fabricating stories that generated national feeling, editors smelling an opportunity to increase their profit. Furthermore, these biographies provided far more heterogeneous versions of the national past than one would expect.

In the Conclusion, Tim Lanzendörfer pulls together his main findings. The Appendices contain title pages of selected magazines as well as a list of the biographies featured in the *Farmer’s Weekly Museum* (which is also discussed in Chapter Two), a useful addition given how difficult keeping track of sources can be when working with magazines. The bibliography is comprehensive, and the listing of cited magazine articles according to the publication they appeared in is a neat feature.

Lanzendörfer’s study approaches periodical publishing as a commercial enterprise and thereby provides a deliberately sobering account of the somewhat amorphous, semi-mythic idea of periodical publishing that has prevailed in Early American studies for some time. Studies in the history of the book have of course raised awareness of the dictates of the market place and the material conditions under which authors and publishers had to work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so Tim Lanzendörfer’s book will not come as an utter surprise to scholars interested in this period. The author himself acknowledges that his study of the economic situation that shaped periodical publishing does not preclude more idealistic approaches to the subject matter. Yet one challenge remains: to what extent does a reading of the magazine as a publishing genre as well as a commodity change or affect our understanding of what actually ‘happens’ in these magazines? In other words: while successful as a reality check, what is the positive value of an approach that highlights the commercial aspects of publishing? How productive can such a corrective reading be? Where can scholars go from there?

These questions notwithstanding, *The Professionalization of the American Magazine* offers a timely and very readable caveat to the field of periodical research and earns a central position in this burgeoning strand of academic scholarship. Exactly because the newly opened periodical archives beckon to

scholars promising troves of raw material, it is important to stay grounded and to acknowledge that patriotism was often linked to the paycheck.

Works Cited

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